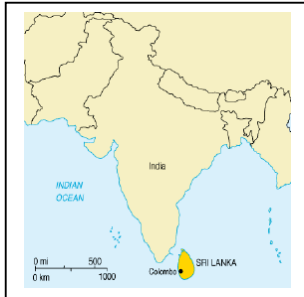


Sri Lanka

Size : 65,525 sq.km

An island off the south-eastern coast shores of India, 880 km north of the equator, in the Indian Ocean.



Commercial Capital : Colombo

Government

Sri Lanka is a free, independent and sovereign nation with a population of 20,926,315 (July 2007 est.). Legislative power is exercised by a Parliament, elected by universal franchise on proportional representation basis. A President, who is also elected by the people, exercises executive power inclusive of defence. Sri Lanka enjoys a multi party system, and the people vote to elect a new government every six years.

National Flag

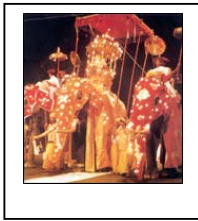
National Flag of Sri Lanka is the Lion Flag. A Lion bearing a sword in its right hand is depicted in gold on red background with a yellow border. Four Bo leaves pointing inwards are at the four corners. Two vertical bands of green and orange at the left end represent the minority ethnic groups. It is an adaptation of the standard of the last King of Sri Lanka.



National Flower	: The Blue Water Lily (<i>Nymphaea stellata</i>)
Highest waterfall	: Bambarakanda - 241 meters
Highest Peak	: Pidurutalagala – 2524 meters
Longest River	: Mahaweli – 335km
Languages	: Sinhala, Tamil and English are widely spoken throughout Sri Lanka, with the exception of remote villages where it might be Sinhala only or Tamil only.
Ethnic Groups	: Sinhalese- 74 per cent; Tamil- 18 per cent; Muslim -7 per cent; Burgher (descendants of Dutch and Portuguese colonist) and others- 1 per cent.
Religions	: Buddhism-70 per cent; Hinduism-16 per cent; Christianity-7 per cent; Islam-7 per Cent.
Climate	: Low Lands - tropical, average 27C Central Hills - cooler, with temperatures dropping to 14C. The south-west monsoon brings rain to the western, southern and central regions from May to July, while the north-eastern monsoon is from December to January. Sri Lanka climate is ideal for holiday-makers throughout the year.
Industries	: Processing of rubber, tea, coconuts, and other agricultural commodities; clothing, cement, petroleum refining, textiles, tobacco.
Agriculture / Products	: Rice, sugarcane, grains, pulses, oilseed, roots, spices, tea, rubber, coconuts, milk, eggs, hides, meat.
Currency	: Sri Lanka follows decimal currency system in Rupees (Rs.) and cents (Cts.) with 100 cents equal to a rupee. Currency notes are available in the denominations of Rs.10,20,50,100,200,500,1000 & 2000. Coins are issued in values of Cts. 25 and 50 and Rs.1,2,5 and 10. The intervention currency continuously will be the US Dollar.
Visa	: Residents from permitted countries are issued visas on arrival. Consult your local Sri Lanka embassy, consulate, tourist office or your travel agent.
Special Events	: 1 st of January is celebrated by all citizens. Sinhala/Tamil New Year - This falls on the 13 or 14 th of April according to the Astrological system the New Year is celebrated at the time Sun enters Aries. As there is no leap year the dates are calculated accurately. Hence it differs from 13 th to 14 th . The Sinhalese stop work at a time given by the astrologers and start the kitchen fire and eating the first meal for the new year at a special time given by the astrologers. This is followed by many games, celebrations throughout the country.

: **Wesak Full Moon** - This is a very special occasion for the Buddhists. They celebrate the birth, enlightenment and the death of Lord Buddha on the May full moon. The entire country is lit with colourful lanterns, illuminated with colourful lights, pandals etc. The streets are full of people who walk around to witness the colourful decorations. There are many temporary stalls who provide free food for these people.

: **Poson Full Moon** - The full moon day of the month of June is celebrated by the Buddhists as it is the day when Rev. Mahinda came from India and preached Buddhism to the people of Sri Lanka during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa 2550 years ago. This happened at Anuradhapura. The City is still the main Buddhist centre with temples and monuments 2500 years old. Thousands of Buddhists visit Anuradhapura on this day for religious activities.



: **Kandy Perahera** - During the rule of the Sinhala Kings before the British rule in Sri Lanka it was a custom to carry the casket containing the Relic of the Buddha during the dry season. The purpose of this was to have proper rain during the rainy season. It was believed that the procession with the relics would bring rain. This is still the belief of the people of Sri Lanka. The main procession begins at Kandy in July. It is the most colourful procession. There are over 100 elephants colourfully dressed and illuminated with coloured lights and many groups of cultural dancers accompanied by drummers. The city is full of people who come from all parts of Sri Lanka and stand on the sides of the streets to watch the pageant. Special pavilions are made for foreign visitors. A sight that is never missed by any Sri Lankan as well as foreign visitors to Sri Lanka.



: **Christmas** - Christmas is celebrated by all Sri Lankans even though it is the most important event of the Christians.

Interesting Places

The City of Colombo is full of modern buildings. However some of the Buildings from the period of the Dutch Rule as well as the British Period still remain. A city tour of Colombo includes a view of all these as well as the busy bazaar, the luxurious residential area, unique Buddhist temples, Churches of the Dutch and British period, Botanical Garden, Bandaranayake Memorial Hall donated by the Chinese Government, Museum and the Zoological Gardens which is considered one of the best in Asia.

ANCIENT CITIES

Five centuries before Christ, Sri Lanka was a land throbbing with vitality and a well-ordered civilization.

Cities, palaces, reservoirs and parks, temples, monasteries, monuments and works of art bore testament to the character, imagination, culture, philosophy and faith of the people of Sri Lanka, the Resplendent Land. Vestiges of this ancient civilization are abundantly extant today and may be reached from Colombo in a comfortable morning's drive through verdant countryside, flourishing green paddy fields, acres of coconut palms and alongside deep jungle in which elephant and leopard roam.

Recorded history emerges from the mists sometime after the advent of the Sinhala, apparently before the Century BC. These were, it is believed, North Indian people of Aryan ancestry, who settled first in the north-central plains and raised in the Island an agricultural elite whose feats of irrigation excite wonder to this day and founded a system of government that proved viable for more than two thousand years.

By the middle of the 3rd Century BC the fame of the capital, Anuradhapura, was known as far abroad as the Mediterranean.

In 247 BC occurred the greatest single event in Sri Lanka's history, when through the missionary labours of the monk Mahinda, son of the Buddhist Emperor Asoka of India, the Island's King, court and commoners were converted to Buddhism. In Sri Lanka this pristine religion found a permanent home and for Buddhists

everywhere the Island became a place of especial sanctity, a repository of holy relics, orthodox doctrine and a goal of pilgrimage.

In spite of many invasions the capital Anuradhapura survived up to the 10th Century. Then it had to be withdrawn to Polonnaruwa, to the rocky forests around Kurunegala, to Kotte near Colombo, finally to the Kandyan hills where the Sinhala Kingdom made its last stand.

Anuradhapura - 210 km north of Colombo the first Capital of Sri Lanka approximately 2500 years old. A Unique city built by voluntary labour. It is the first City in the world with an Appointed Mayor. Also this City was built close to man made lakes which supplied the water. Strict sanitary conditions were maintained. The bidets and urinary toilets were fitted with filters so that the waste which went to the ground was clean. Precincts were set aside for huntsmen and scavengers and even heretics and foreigners. There were hostels and hospitals, separate cemeteries for high and low castes.

Mihinthale - Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka during this period and Rev. Arihath Mahinda preached Buddhism to King Devanampiyatissa at Mihintale a mountain Forest at Anuradhapura regarded as the cradle of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. On that day the King declared this Mihinthale Mountain Forest a wild life sanctuary. Later on this became a Monastery for Buddhists in which the priests lived and meditated. Domes called Dagaba as tall as the Pyramids were built enshrining The relics of the Buddha. These Buddhist temples still remain well maintained as Anuradhapura is the main Buddhist centre in Sri Lanka. A few years later The Priestess Sangamitta



Isurumuniya Temple

brought a sapling of the Bo-tree under which Lord Buddha attained his sublime wisdom (Nirwana). This was planted in this City and still remain as the most important Buddhist temple. It is called **Sri Maha Bodhi**. This is the oldest religiously authenticated tree in the world. There were over 5000 Buddhist Priests in monasteries around the **Sri Maha Bodhi**. Adjoining the Sri Maha Bodhi is the **Lova Maha Paya**, a building with over 1000 rooms and 9 floors. The ground floor stone pillars are still fascinating. A few meters away is **Isurumuniya Temple** the first Buddhist image house built in Sri Lanka. As you move a little further is the **Thuparama Dagaba** the first Dagaba built in Sri Lanka enshrining the relics of the Buddha.



Sri Maha Bodhi



Lova Maha Paya

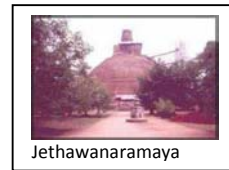


Thuparama Dagaba

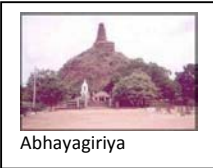


Ruwan Weli Saya

The other giant Dagabas are Ruwan Weli Saya, Jethawanaramaya and Abhayagiriya. They are as tall as the pyramids. Jethawanaramaya was a monastery where thousands of Buddhists lived. The remains of the Jethawanaramaya monastery is unbelievable. The



Jethawanaramaya



Abhayagiriya

Anuradhapura Museum, Jethawana Museum are two of the most fascinating museums in Sri Lanka. The Moonstone which was at the entrances of most of the shrines is a beautiful stone carving which symbolises some of the principles of Buddhism. The Samadhi Buddha Statue one of the most serene Buddha Statues carved in stone is another precious Buddhist monuments. The visitors then will see the Twin Ponds which was the bathing place of the Buddhist



Twin Ponds

Monks.



Pulasti the sage

Polonnaruwa - 220 km from Colombo and south east of Anuradhapura is the Island's medieval capital. When early in the 11th century AD Anuradhapura suffered one of the worst of its many invasions, Polonnaruwa became the next Capital. Today's ruins, however, belong almost exclusively to the reigns of two kings. The City in its day was fortified with three concentric walls, beautified with parks and gardens and sanctified by many a shrine and sacred place. The City itself, as well as the surrounding plain was watered by a unique irrigational complex know as the Sea of Parakrama (Parakrama Samudra) so vast was its scale. Every visitor to Polonnaruwa is fascinated with the vast scale of the Parakrama Samudra and the remains



Polonnaruwa



Palace of King Parakramabahu



Audience hall of King Nissankamalla

of this ancient city. The sluice gate of the lake where water was sent along channels to the rice fields is a master piece of engineering. The statue of the sage Pulasthi in front of the ancient university is still beautiful to look at. The Bisokotuwa which was the bathing place of the Queens, audience



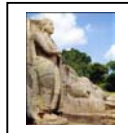
Audience hall of King Parakramabahu

hall of King Nissankamalla is close to the museum. The remains of the seven floor palace of King Parakramabahu, his audience hall, royal bath are within the walls of the Royal premises. The Watadage, stone book, the Dalada Madura where the tooth relic of Lord Buddha was placed for worship, the Nissanka Latha Mandapaya, the Thuparama temple and the Shiva kovil, Lankathilaka, the Hospital, the

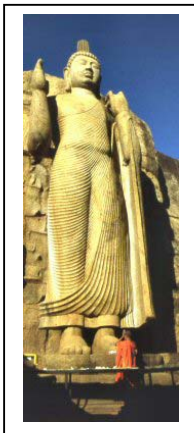


Royal Bath

most fascinating Gal Vihara where the statues are carved out of one single rock, the beautiful lotus pond and the thiwanka pilimage are some of the most fascinating sites at Polonnaruwa.



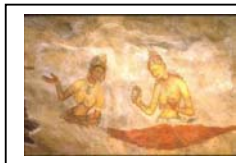
The Aukana Buddha



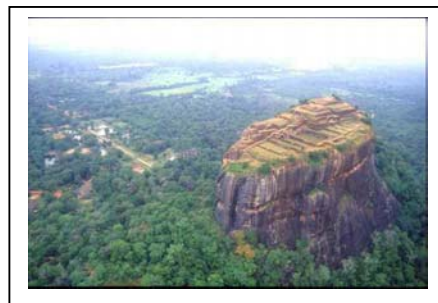
The Aukana Buddha was carved in the fifth century, during the reign of Dhatusena from 459 to 477AD and who was responsible for many great works - including building the enormous Kala Wewa tank (or lake) at Aukana. The statue looks towards the tank and, at a certain time, the eyes are level with the water. It is beautifully upright with the tip of the nose exactly over a 'plumbline marker' between the feet. The pleats of the robe are seen as an artistic masterpiece of the time. And while the right hand, the one that usually indicates meaning in Buddha statues, is in the gesture of 'the giving of the blessing', the symbolism of the left hand involves the gathering up of the robe in preparation to step over a river - a representation of the cycle of rebirths. In stories that find echoes through the rest of the Theravadan Buddhist world of Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia, only local people knew of the Buddha during the years of decay and external threats. Then, around 1850, British archaeologists came upon the statue. Sir James Emerson Tennent, writing in Ceylon (1859), tells how an associate "chanced to follow the track of a herd of wild elephants near the tank of Kala Wewa when he suddenly found himself in front of a gigantic statue in the forest, whose existence had been previously unknown to Europeans. He led us to the spot and our surprise was extreme on beholding a figure of Buddha, nearly 50 feet in height, carved from the face of a granite cliff, and so detached that only two slender ties had been left unhewn at the back to support the colossus".

Sigiriya Rock Fortress

Sigiriya was no mere fortress, gloomy and forbidding. At the brief height of its glory – it was a royal citadel for more than 18 years, from 477 – to 495 AD and one of the loveliest that have graced this land.

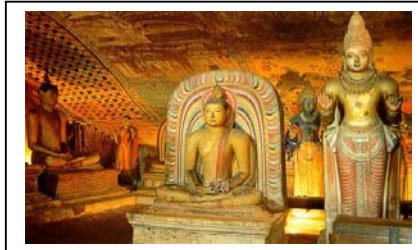


King Dhatusena who had the honour of building the Aukana Buddha statue had two sons, Kassapa by a wife of unequal birth, and Moggallana born of the anointed queen. Kassapa built for himself at Sigiriya, a palace a City modelled on the mythical abode of "Kuvera" God of Wealth. He gave form to his dreams of grandeur. Eighteen years later, his half-brother Moggallan challenged him with an army. By one of those momentary mistake of judgement that changes the course of history, Kassapa thought he was alone in battle, raised his dagger and slew himself. The remains of this fortress, the fabulous paintings have made people to consider this the 8th wonder of the world.

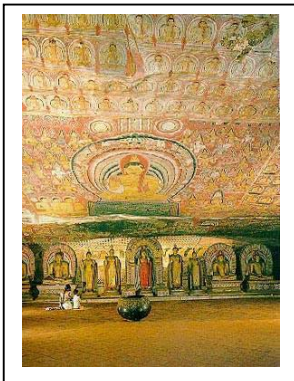


In a sheltered pocket on the western face of the Sigiriya rock, approached by a spiral stairway, are the famous frescoes. Epigraphical evidenced refers to the existence of 500 such portraits, but only 19 remain today. On the western and northern sides of the steep rock face runs a gallery or [pathway which provides access to the seemingly inaccessible summit. Shielding this pathway is a 9 ½ ft. plaster wall, so highly polished, that even today, after fifteen centuries of exposure to sun, wind and rain, one can see one's reflection in it. Hence the name "Mirror Wall". The summit of the rock is nearly three acres in extent. The outer wall of palace which the main building was constructed on the brink of the precipice. There were gardens, cisterns and ponds laid out attractively.

Dambulla



The Cave Temples of Dambulla is another fascinating site. Twelve miles from Sigiriya Dambulla is a vast isolated rock



mass 500ft high and a mile round the base. Almost at the top you find the famous rock temple dating to the first century B.C. The caves of Dambulla sheltered the king during his 14 years of exile from Anuradhapura. When he regined the throne he built the most magnificent of rock-temples of the island. There are five caves turned into shrines.

In the first cave is recumbent image of the Buddha 47ft. long, cut out of the rock. There are images of deities associated with Buddhism. The frescoes on the walls and ceiling could be dated to the 15th-18th centuries. In the second cave, the finest and the largest of all, are not less than 150 life-size statues of gods. There are numerous images of the Buddha as well. The ceiling too is covered with frescoes which depict great events in the life of the Buddha , and landmarks in the history of the Sinhala people.

YAPAHUWA



An aient fortress and capital in the year 1301. Situated in the Kurunegala District about 150km from Colombo. Yapahuwa is like the better known Sigiriya, a rock rising abruptly from its surroundings, to a height of about 300ft. Yapahuwa is surrounded by moats and ramparts. Many traces of other ancient battle defence may still be seen, while an ornamental stairway remains its biggest showpiece. It is stated that during this period Sri Lanka had sent emissaries or ambassadors to many countries around the world. The different types of coins and currency found during this period speaks for itself.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact us. We are always at your service.

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